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Debate on Bernard Yack's

Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community **(2012, U. of Chicago).**

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Jonathan Hearn (chair): Opening Remarks

Bernard Yack's *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community* (2012) was the subject of the eighth in a long-running series of debates hosted by The Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) and *Nations and Nationalism* in November of 2013. These debates bring together the authors of recent important works in the study of nationalism and ethnicity with appropriate scholars to explore the questions they have provoked. On this occasion Professor Yack was joined by Professor Chandran Kukathas and Professor David Miller.

Chandran Kukathas holds a Chair in Political Theory in the Department of Government at the London School of Economics. His work addresses the history of liberal thought, contemporary liberal theory, and issues of multiculturalism. He has examined the work of John Rawls and F. A. Hayek, and advances his own justification of liberalism and multiculturalism in *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (Oxford, 2003), in which he argues that the looser image of the 'archipelago' is a more fitting metaphor for this form of society than 'the body politic' or the 'ship of state'.

David Miller is Professor of Political Theory, Politics and International Relations, at Nuffield College, Oxford. His writing on political theory has been particularly concerned with issues of justice and equality, and the themes of nationality,

citizenship, territory and immigration. A distinguishing feature of his work is the use of evidence from the social sciences to inform debates in political philosophy. Recent work has been particularly concerned with global and social justice, and problems of collective responsibility. He recently published *Justice for Earthlings: essays in political philosophy* (Cambridge UP, 2013).

Bernard Yack is Lerman-Neubauer Professor of Democracy and Public Policy in the Department of Politics at Brandies University. He works on political theory and the history of political thought, and has been increasingly concerned with questions of nationalism and cultural pluralism. Our alienations from, and understandings of, 'modernity' are the respective key themes of his books *The Longing for Total Revolution* (1986) and *The Fetishism of Modernities* (1997). The book that is the subject of the present debate, *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community* (2012) takes further some of the ideas developed previously in *The Problems of a Political Animal: Community, Conflict, and Justice in Aristotelian Political Thought* (1993). He has also edited a volume of essays, *Liberalism Without Illusions* (1996), on the work of the late Judith Shklar, who was his PhD supervisor.

The main argument of *Nationalism and the Moral Psychology of Community* is that to understand nationalism and its hold on people's minds we need to understand it as composed of two things: a sense of community, and the idea of popular sovereignty. For Yack national community arises out of a shared heritage of experiences, which can have quite diverse bases, and associated feelings of what he calls 'social friendship', meaning genuine mutual concern, not just abstract

obligation. Thus he formulates a very open and flexible conception of community—highly contingent and variable in its origins, but nonetheless 'fateful' in how it circumscribes political possibilities. Central to his concern here is to break with the idea of community as somehow 'traditional', an aspect of our lost past, or something to be recovered in a utopian future. National community in his terms is a present reality.

After developing his conception of modern national community, the latter half of the book grapples with the consequences of the idea of popular sovereignty, which he sees, fairly conventionally, as a theory of political legitimacy that arises in the eighteenth century. Modern nationalism takes shape when patterns of national community are variously drawn into the new politics of sovereignty. Two general conclusions arise out of his argument. On the one hand, we should not condemn national sentiments or assume that we can easily transcend a nationally organised world. Yack expresses scepticism towards cosmopolitan 'solutions' to nationalism and national identity. On the other hand, this general condition will lead to intractable conflicts if we assume that concordance between territory, community and sovereignty can always be achieved. Moreover, when national interest, solidarity, and a sense of injustice become strongly aligned, we are prone to a certain moral blindness, easily losing sight of our basic moral respect for and recognition of those outside the national community, with whom 'our' group has come into conflict. In sum, we need to be prepared to compromise and moderate our national sentiments, but we must also 'learn to live with nationalism'.

In keeping with Yack's style of thought, the book's argument does not offer 'solutions' or attempt to replace one theory with another. Rather, it offers a more nuanced assessment of 'the problem', and includes many interesting and rewarding by-ways and auxiliary arguments along the way, that have not been summarised here. In what follows, Professors Kukathas and Miller offer critical engagements with Yack's argument.

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